



For the Lifespan: The Caregiver Guide

Module 5

Taking Care of the Caregiver



After completing this module, participants will be able to:



- Understand your rights as a caregiver.
- Understand the importance of making time for you.
- Learn how to combat “compassion fatigue”.
- Identify some ways to better care for their health.
- Learn tips on juggling working and caregiving.

Family Stories

Teresa was responsible for caring for her 88-year-old father. Between keeping track of her father's prescriptions, his bowel and bladder issues, and visits to the doctor, Teresa could barely keep up with her parenting responsibilities, much less her obligations at work. The stress she experienced contributed to health problems and marital strain. Teresa's stress was high and she was feeling very discouraged. She talked to her friends about her problems, but was afraid they would get sick of her complaints. Teresa knew she needed help, but felt guilty. She thought, "I should be able to *deal* with this!"

Family Feelings

- Having positive and negative feelings about caregiving is common.
- Negative feelings may include worry, irritability, sadness, anger, and stress.
- Caregivers who also parent are called the “sandwich generation”.
- It is common to want support.
- It is just as common to deny one’s need for support out of feelings of guilt or lack of information about resources.



Caregiver Bill of Rights:



As a caregiver, I have the right:

- To take care of myself. This is not being selfish, but a tool to take better care of the person I care for.
- To seek help from others even though the person I am caring for might object. I recognize the limits of my own endurance and strength.
- To maintain facets of my own personal life. I know that I do everything that I reasonably can for this person, and I have the right to do things for myself.
- To get angry, be depressed, and express other difficult feelings occasionally.

Caregiver Bill of Rights: (cont.)

- To reject attempts by the person I care for to manipulate me through guilt and/or depression.
- To receive consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance for what I do, from the person I care for, as long as I offer these qualities in return.
- To take pride in what I am accomplishing and applaud the courage it has taken to meet the needs of the person I am caring for.





Caregiver Bill of Rights: (cont.)

- To protect my individuality and my right to make a life for myself that will sustain me in the time when help is no longer needed by the person I am caring for.
- To expect and demand that as new strides are made in finding resources to aid persons with physical and cognitive disabilities in our country, similar strides will be made towards aiding and supporting caregivers.

Adapted from *Caregiving: Helping an Aged Loved One*, by Jo Horne, 1985, Salt Lake County Aging Services – A Caregiver's Guide.



Safety and Hygiene



- Treat all blood and bodily fluids as if they might be contagious and contain blood borne pathogens.
- Use gloves, face masks, and other protective equipment when needed to protect yourself and others.
- Protective equipment should be used whenever contact with bodily fluids may occur.



Use Help and Resources



- Accept that you cannot do everything on your own. Use help from family and friends and the resources available to you.
- Accept a variety of feelings in yourself as you care for another person.
- Accept that you also have needs that need to be met if you are to continue as a caregiver.
- Use respite care services to help relieve some of the stress felt by providing full time care for another person.

Addressing Compassion Fatigue



- Attend groups for caregivers who are interested in learning pertinent skills. Check with your local Agency on Aging or www.caregiver.com.
- Talk with family members and friends about feelings.
- Talk with clergy members or spiritual advisors.
- Blog or write about your experiences as a caregiver.

Protecting Your Privacy and Possessions

- Maintain privacy when using outside help.
- Consolidate important documents.
 - Helps when planning appointments.
 - Allows for easier securing of information.
 - Less likely to be misplaced or disposed of.
 - Less likely to be seen by others.
- Lock up money, checks, credit cards, jewelry, and valuables.
- Avoid letting providers use auto, phone, or home for personal use.



Attending to Your Physical Health

- Eat healthy meals.
- Get adequate sleep.
- Maintain your regular medical checkup schedule.
- Participate in a regular exercise program.
- Manage and reduce stress levels.



Strategies



- Daily relaxation.
- Engaging in spiritual activities/practices you find renewing.
- Talking with trusted friends (and others) about your real feelings as a caregiver.
- Participating in a hobby or activity you find enjoyable.
- Giving yourself regular caregiving breaks.
- Socializing with others.
- Regularly using respite care services available to you.

Team Approach

- Try to use a “team” approach to caregiving.
- Be assertive when communicating.
- Delegate responsibilities to others.
- Take turns with difficult tasks.
- Encourage one another.



Communicating



- Active listening:

<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.html>

- Assertive communication tips:

http://www.twu.edu/downloads/counseling/e-1_assertive_communication.pdf

- Creating support communities:

www.lotsahelpinghands.org

- Geriatric case managers:

<http://www.caremanager.org>



Fostering Independence in Family Members

- Be patient – the dependent person in your care may take longer to accomplish a task than you.
- Trust someone's capacity to problem-solve.
- Speak in adult, non-patronizing tones.
- Be encouraging and praise successes.
- Have expectations.
- Remember, if they can do it, they should do it!



Organizing Medications

- Make a list of all their medications and place in a folder with dosage amounts and times.
- Include contact information for doctors and other medical professionals providing care, as well as the pharmacy that fills prescriptions.
- Bring the folder with you to all medical visits/ appointments and keep handy for all related phone conversations.

Caregiving Responsibilities

- Make a list of every person and every agency available to help with caregiving responsibilities.
- Make a list of everything the care recipient needs help with on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.
- Include even the most seemingly trivial things such as washing laundry, socialization opportunities, or exercise routines.



Caregiving Responsibilities (cont.)

- Cross examine each list determining:
 - Who can help with what.
 - What can be done with minimal support.
 - What you need to personally take care of, etc.
- Enlist the help of your support system and available resources to accomplish the execution of the list.
- Review the list(s) periodically to assess changing needs and resource availability.





Some Useful Juggling Tips

- Speak up! Talk to your boss before exhaustion affects your work. Minimize details, and emphasize that you are doing your best.
- Negotiate a flex schedule – if possible, try to negotiate a schedule that better fits your caretaking tasks.
- Negotiate a telecommuting position – if possible, depending on the type of work you do.
- Investigate! See if your company has any kind of programs or resources available for you.
- Divide and conquer! Have a network of helpers and support persons to assist you with caregiving.



Reinventing Your Attitude



- When faced with overwhelming demands, it is often necessary to reinvent our attitude.
- What discoveries are you making?
- How are you growing in your ability to love?
- Focus on the present.
- Look for moments of pleasure and enjoyment and string them together.
- Caregiving may be burdensome, but it can also be a gift.



Four Kinds of People

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter once said, "There are four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who currently are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers."



Take a Break



- Ask for help!
- Develop a master list of what you need to do.
- Highlight the tasks you don't like to do or are difficult.
- Use this list to make a Help List.
- Share the list with family and friends.
- Ask them for help.
- Review this list often and update.
- Recognize that you need help!
- Acknowledge that you can't do it all!

Things to Remember



- Remember to take good care of yourself by staying positive, exercising regularly, getting enough rest, eating nutritiously, using good body mechanics, keeping a sense of humor, relaxing, and doing something enjoyable when you can.
- Always believe in yourself and your abilities.
- Remember that you have the strength, courage, compassion, and wisdom to succeed.
- Thanks for your participation.